He fell to his knees behind Arain and gripped the quivering buttocks, so cool, cool to quench his fire, melons cooled in the snow. He kissed them again and again, teasing, tasting, parting them, while his mate trembled with desire and still submitted, helpless, will-less, his. He teased the place with his tongue, rimming the tight clenched muscle, breathing the arousal of his mate. His hand sought the straining cock and he could feel his own double stimulation, the liquid licking, the strong, milking stroke of his hand. He felt his mate's need--and his own.

He rose as Arain leaned forward in his bonds and pressed close, sure and snug against the door, but not yet entering. Quivering, sobbing, still his mate awaited his will--whether life, death, pleasure or pain. And he gave joy, pressing through the yielding door, up satin corridors, until he was deep in exquisite, electric clutchings.

His bondmate felt no pain, but he felt the fragility of the delicate, perfect body, felt the silent plea, Don't leave me!, the long hunger of the flesh for his flesh, his hands, his lips. He eased them down, pulling his mate close into his lap where he could caress the smooth chest, the hard, sensitive nipples that begged to be bruised and bruised again in passion's service. He could see in the mirrors what the watchers saw--the golden slave in his lap, thighs spread wide over his own, arms outstretched, hands gripping his chains. Let them, that rose-red tower climbed from its golden sea for him alone, begging for his touch.

He called the fire then and let it flow from his center as he stroked the trembling thighs, the jewel heavy weight of the testicles. He let his fingers skim the golden curls and his mate sobbed aloud with pleasure. He took the straining cock in his hand, pulsing velvet, and stroked up. Concentric rings of fire stroked him in return as he began a slow, joined rocking that melded bodies close as minds. The scent of his mate's hair, fragrance of his skin, the slip and clench along his cock, the proud tower under his hand, all right, known, familiar--his to command now and forever. He could will death now and it would be their shared will--but he chose life and let the liquid fire flow.

His mate screamed, convulsing in his arms as the creamy fountain climbed and spread its transcient lace on the air, and he prolonged his own molten surge until the golden head fell back on his shoulder to offer one last, abandonned, fainting kiss. Complete. He released the fire and followed it out into the dark....

McCoy blinked, Arain's weight heavy in his arms, his own body exhausted and achingly lonely. When he caught his breath, the scent of burning choked him, and the simple effort of breathing sent flashes of agony through him. He felt used, beaten and lonely. He was alone in his head and Spock was reaching for the chains, releasing them in the flickering red-gold light, taking Arain from his arms, covering McCoy with a cloak, wrapping Arain in another. The flames were real, running from the hangings up toward the ceiling. Spontaneous fires had broken out in a dozen places in the room and the Romulans coupling on their couches and the floor were far more interested in escape than in the ultimate ownership of a slave. Tarsa lay still on the floor, and McCoy was given no time to ask questions. He stumbled out of the room like a lost child, clutching Spock's cloak.

They emerged into a world of stark contrast to the heat and softness inside. Here there was only hard stone, black and silver shadow from an outsize moon, and the cutting cold and silence of desert night. He was shaken and drained, almost too weak to follow Spock's long strides down stone stairs and deserted alleys to a house near the wall and ultimately through it, down deep enough to avoid the forcefield.

Spock had a pack there--uniforms and a medical tricorder. McCoy struggled into his clothes with his back turned and when he faced around Spock was once again dressed as a Star Fleet officer. Arain still lay unconscious on the ground. The tricorder showed no damage. He had not been a virgin, and his body was functioning as it should.

"Physically--physically he's perfect," said McCoy, trying to get his voice into a natural register and not quite making it.

"Perfect," said Spock. Unselfconsciously he knelt on one knee and turned back the folds of the cloak. It was the same black velvet he had begun in. Spock's fingers touched the dark, damp gold of his hair.

"I still don't understand--what happened, Spock. If you want to tell me."

Spock sighed.

"In the initial stages of the meld, the partner with the strongest drive dominates. Among Vulcans the other submits, utterly, giving mind and body into the stronger's keeping until their drives match. That is Taaz Avine. Ordinarily, it lasts a few moments, an hour, and it is great joy to submit so utterly or accept such submission. You know."

Yes, for a moment, before Spock's fire ruled him utterly, he had known the submission of Arain.

"We were attacked--parted. Perhaps that caused his amnesia. His life as well as mine depended on consumation."

Between them Arain slept. "Now what?"

For answer, Spock's strong fingers forced the collar's catch, broke the bands from the chafed wrists.

"He has begun to heal. He is already dreaming of his ship." His ship. The dream Spock had not shared.

"Then--he'll be all right?"

Spock looked down at the youthful, dreaming face. "He will be as he was, with no memory. This is the least part of his personality--a dream summoned for my sake. His reality has been safe in my keeping. Dress him and I will return it."

Numbly McCoy took the little bundle of clothes, saw the gold of the shirt, realized for the first time in the cold light that Spock was clad in science blue instead of the gold he'd been entitled to wear since Jim had been lost. He remembered Arain's uncompromising glance, his fever heat and satin skin, his panted promise "to cleanse your honor with my life." A promise made to him, caught between